

PFLAG-T EDMONTON

January/February 1998

PFLAG-T

We are Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians, Bisexuals, Gays and Transgenders.

Our primary objectives are

- to offer mutual support to each other wherever needed;
- to invite others to share knowledge, to be free from fear, and to reach out, search and discover more about these family members and friends.

SUPPORT MEETINGS

Tues, Jan 20, 1998

&

Tues, Feb 17, 1998

Suite 103, 10612 - 124 St

7:30 pm

Everyone Welcome.



VINCENT LIU

A Prairie Parent's Story

by Sheelagh

L is an open-minded, fun loving mother of a lesbian daughter. She loves her friends and family, has a great sense of humour but is also happy with her own company.

This is a conversation about L's feelings and reactions when she learned that her daughter was gay. Here is what she said . . .

'My daughter told me she was gay seven or eight years ago. S. was 27 at the time and

she'd probably known that she was gay for 5 or 6 years before that. She'd been trying to tell me for years. She had her friends, they'd known for a long time.

S. was moving back home for a few months and she wanted to tell me before she came back. She'd even come over several times but didn't manage it. She had the book, *Now That You Know*, to give me but she just didn't manage it. Once I had a friend there so she couldn't tell me then. Her friends were confident I'd be alright with it but she just didn't know for sure what my attitude would be.

The moment came because she was returning. She said something like I want to tell you about my life-style and I thought she was joking because we're always joking about. I said 'Fine, any time'. Then one day she asked could she talk to me . . . Then I realized it was for real. I didn't know what she wanted to tell me.

S. had a really hard time telling me. We were sitting at the kitchen table with a cup of

Please share this newsletter

tea. I had to start guessing things. 'I know you're not doing drugs, I know you're not pregnant . . .'. She was shaking like a leaf. She smokes. I almost invited her to smoke even though I don't let people smoke in my house. Finally she said that she liked girls. I heard what she said but somehow that wasn't what she said. I think I said something like 'Some people do'. Then she was able to talk. It frightened her so. When she did tell me she said 'If you rejected me I'd have nowhere to go'. Even if she was a prostitute or doing drugs I would never reject her, not for any reason. That's what makes me so angry at these parents who don't even want to hear, who reject their children".

Were you surprised?

"Totally and absolutely. I didn't have a clue. I hadn't suspected for one second. Ever.

She'd had gay friends - so do I. It had never been an issue for me. At high school she dated only two different guys, nothing long, and only a date or two. She only dated in high school because it was expected. She knew she was different. There was a boy at the school who was out and he was gay bashed a number of times. That could have made a difference. I don't know if she really knew for

sure that she was gay at that time. I didn't think much about how little she was dating at the time, I didn't clue into that. I hadn't done a lot of dating myself at that age. I've been a single parent all my life, I've never been married. We were always very close and I've never had any problems with my daughter but that part of her life she couldn't tell me about. On the weekends she couldn't tell me, "I went to a gay bar" or "I went dancing" or that she was going out with a lady or whatever. I realize now that I was just vague about what she'd been doing.

I guess her telling me - it did bring us closer together because there was only that one secret between us and now there are none. She can say what she's doing. I was probably somewhat - I couldn't call it shocked - I went numb I guess. I can't even remember exactly what I said.

I've certainly changed my thinking as I've learned more about sexual orientation. What makes me sad - angry - about the night she talked to me about being gay was something else she told me at the same time, that she was raped. She couldn't tell me at the time - when she was twelve years old. This guy she

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went out with once, he was a real jerk, a real smooth talker.

Unreal. She couldn't come home and tell me. She was just twelve years old. I wish she'd told me. I would have made sure that he went to jail. It was so hard for me to deal with. She told me at the same time as she told me about being gay. That rape was so much more difficult for me to deal with. I was barely able to deal with that. And I am certain that the rape had nothing to do with her being gay.

I could say that I had to stop and think, I had to get used to the idea. It was a kind of selfish thing at the time. I thought about how nice it would be to have grandchildren. I'm over that now, there are other young people in my life. Just occasionally I find myself in the baby section of a shop and get a little emotional.

My advice to young people coming out would be 'Just tell your parents that nothing has changed. You're just the same as you've always been. You haven't sprouted horns! You are the same person you were minutes before'.

I'd advise parents to show their children the same amount of respect they

always have, to reinforce their love for them. I'm so glad my love for my child overcame my ignorance about homosexuality. I'd tell other parents that they are not alone. I'd tell them about all the support there is".

How did you go about telling people yourself?

"Actually, you know, my daughter said she was happy for me to tell my friends but just to check with her about it, to let her know who I'd told. I never once had a friend reject me but it kind of annoyed me that one of my friends said 'Oh I thought you knew and you just weren't talking about it'. Others said the same sort of thing and it got to the point where I thought I'd bop the next friend who said that. I just treasure my friends, I can't say I lost anyone. I guess it was like one of those marriage breakups where the wife is the last to know! Even my dad - he was 82 years old at the time and he was visiting us. So I said was it OK if I told him? We were out on 82nd Street and we went into this little restaurant. I was really nervous. I asked what were his views on homosexuality? He said, 'I don't know anything about it'. Then I told him my daughter was gay and he said 'Well, I can give her a hug

just like I always did'. I was crying my eyes out, when he said that. I couldn't stop the tears flowing. I was trying to eat and trying not to draw attention to myself. We'd never talked about anything like that and I didn't know how he'd react.

There's one thing I'd suggest to people coming out. When my daughter told me, her friends were all waiting for her down in a restaurant. I think what I'd suggest is that I didn't want to be alone to digest the information. I wish she'd have been there that night. If she'd just been here it would have been nice. I don't know what I'd have asked. I was so ignorant. And I can see her point of view. We did talk for about an hour. I went and sat on the couch with a cup of tea and I thought, 'Oh my God, she's gay'. That's when things started to come into my mind. I was thinking "What if . . . What if they find out where she's working but of course she'd been living with that, dealing with it for some years

... Of course later on you start hearing horror stories about things that happen and that worries you. When I just joined FLAG-T two young gay men came to one of the meetings. The parents of one of them wanted to tar and feather him; it was like a story

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you'd hear not something that would really happen. They are the nicest kids.

Through FLAG-T I've talked to a lot of people, heard a lot of stories. Sometimes people are quite distraught, hardly able to accept that you are prepared to listen and not condemn them. Once people who haven't told anyone get started, the floodgates open. Sometimes they don't know there are counsellors and support groups at all. They don't know anything about the community. I've cried with a lot of people. Some stories you hear at PFLAG-T meetings are very heart-warming; gay couples who stay together. Sometimes I've been really surprised about which people are supportive, the ones you'd least expect."

Prairies Church Welcomes Gay Crowd

(Courtesy the Gala Occasion, December, 1997)

Saskatoon . . . A local United Church has joined nine others across Canada in formally welcoming gays and lesbians.

United Churches in Vancouver, Toronto and Winnipeg have also opened their doors. Members of St. Thomas-Wesley in Saskatoon studied the issue for two years and held a vote earlier this year.

"People whose lifestyle might be different have not been welcomed by the church with the same intensity," said Rev. Pamela Thomas. "We hope many of the people who have felt hurt or excluded by the Christian church will have their trust restored. We hope they will recognize they do have a place in the church."

For Minorities, Timing is Everything

BY OLIVE JOHNSON

(Courtesy PFLAG Vancouver Newsletter, September, 1997)

Left-handedness and homosexuality both tend to run in families. As my husband's family and mine have some of each, it is not surprising that one of our children is left-handed and another homosexual.

Both my left-handed daughter and my homosexual son turned out to be bright, funny, talented people with loving friends and family. But their experience of growing up in different minority groups was a striking contrast and an interesting illustration of how societal attitudes change as sufficient knowledge accumulates to make old beliefs untenable.

By the time my daughter was growing up, left-handedness

was no longer regarded as a sign of immorality or mental deficiency. Almost everybody knew "openly" left-handed friends, teachers and relatives and viewed them as normal people who wrote differently.

Except for a little awkwardness in learning to write at school, my daughter's hand preference was simply never an issue. If people noticed it at all, they did so with a shrug. Nobody called her nasty names or banned school library books about left-handed families, as school trustees in Surrey, B.C., recently banned books about gay families. Nobody criticized her left-handed "lifestyle" or suggested that she might be an unfit role model for young children. Nobody claimed that she *chose* to be left-handed and should suffer the consequences.

My gay son did not choose to be different either, but when he was growing up, homosexuality was still too misunderstood to be accepted as just another variant of human sexuality. Because gay people still felt unsafe revealing their sexual orientation, he was deprived of the opportunity of knowing openly gay teachers, friends and relatives. He grew up hearing crude jokes and nasty names for people like

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him, and he entered adulthood knowing that being openly gay could prevent you from getting a job or renting an apartment. It could also get you assaulted.

Bigotry has never been reserved for homosexuality, of course. I am old enough to remember the time when bigotry directed toward other minorities in Canada was similar to that which is still sometimes aimed at homosexuals. In my Vancouver childhood, Chinese were regularly called "Chinks" (the boys in my high school wore black denim "Chink pants" tailored for them in Chinatown). Black people were "niggers," prohibited from staying in most Vancouver hotels. Kids in the special class were "retards" or "morons". Jews were suspected of all sorts of crazy things, and physically disabled people were often regarded as mental defectives.

Left-handed children were still being punished for writing with their left hand, particularly in the more religious parts of Canada. (When I was a graduate psychology student in Newfoundland doing research on handedness, I discovered that several of my "right-handed" subjects were

... Cont'd on page 6

actually left-handers; at school their left hands had been tied behind their backs by zealous nuns.)

The gay children and teachers of my childhood were simply invisible. Two female teachers could live together without raising eyebrows, chiefly because women in those days (especially women *teachers*) were not generally thought of as sexual persons. Two male "bachelors" living together did tend to be suspect, and so gay men brave enough to live together usually kept their living arrangements quiet. "Sissy" boys and "boyish" girls took a lot of teasing, but most people knew too little about homosexuality to draw any conclusions. **These boys and girls were expected to grow up and marry people of the opposite sex. Some of them did, divorcing years later to live with one of their own.**

Many of the teachers and parents of my childhood who tried to convert left-handed children into right-handers probably believed they were helping children avoid the stigma of being left-handed, just as many misguided therapists tried to "cure" patients of their homosexuality to enable them to avoid the stigma of being gay in a heterosexual world.

Thanks to advances in our understanding, left-

handedness gradually came to be seen as a natural and innate trait. We know now that people do not *choose* to be more skillful with one hand than the other; they simply are. While researchers are still debating the precise mechanisms that determine hand preference, there is general agreement that left- and right-handedness are just two different (and valid) ways of being. Left-handers are a minority in their own right, not "deviants" from normal right-handedness.

The same is true for sexual orientation. Although we do not yet clearly understand the mechanisms that determine sexual orientation, all indicators point to the conclusion that it results from interactions between genetic, hormonal and possible other factors, all beyond the individual's control. Like left-handedness, homosexuality is a valid alternative sexuality, not a deviance from "normal" heterosexuality.

As with other minorities, attitudes toward homosexuality are inevitable becoming more liberal, at least in Canada. A recent poll, commissioned by the B.C. Teachers' Federation, found

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that almost 70 per cent of B.C. residents think students should be taught in school to accept homosexuals and treat them as they would other people. (Twenty per cent said homosexuality should be discouraged, 9 per cent said they didn't know and 3 per cent refused to answer.)

These results indicate that overt bigotry toward homosexuality is increasingly limited to religious extremists. The Surrey school trustees who voted against having gay and lesbian resource materials in schools are probably at about the same stage of cultural evolution as were the Newfoundland nuns who tied children's left hands behind their backs 40 years ago.

Even so, I'm grateful that they're further along the path of enlightenment than their predecessors in medieval Europe, who burned many left-handers and homosexuals at the stake. Being born in the late 20th century was a wise move on the part of my son and daughter. In some things, timing is everything.

Olive Johnson is a clinical psychologist in Vancouver.

COMING SOON!**Deciding What to do About Your Gender Dysphoria:**

Some Considerations for
Those Who are Thinking
About Sex Reassignment

(Denny, Dallas, 1991)

This booklet will soon be available at the Gay and Lesbian Community Centre or from PFLAG/T [REDACTED]

In the words of the author, Dallas Denny, M.A., "This booklet is written for those of you who are severely conflicted about your gender. Its purpose is to inform you of your alternatives, and to help you make a reasoned and considered choice about how you will spend the rest of your life. It is not designed to encourage you to seek or discourage you from seeking sex reassignment, but to enable you to foresee areas of difficulty and hopefully avoid problems.

We live in a time in which medical science and social attitudes have made it possible for an individual to alter his or her physical characteristics and social role and live as a member of the opposite gender. This is rare and extreme thing for a person to do.

Sex reassignment is not instantaneous, and it is not easy. It is a medical, psychological, and social process that can take years. It

can disrupt every part of a person's life. It should be done only after great deliberation about how it will affect not only the life of the individual with gender dysphoria, but the lives of family and friends.

Despite the difficulties in changing gender, thousands of men and women have done so successfully, and have found greater happiness and fulfillment in their lives. Some have experienced great adversity, and some have had few problems. You must weight the pros and cons of reassignment and make the choice that is right for you.

AEGIS believes that one's gender is a matter of informed personal choice. This series of booklets is designed to provide information which will help you to make competent and rational decisions about your gender."

**Parents of Adult
Gay/Lesbian Children
Needed for Research Study**

My name is Louise MacKay and I am a Doctoral student in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta. For my Doctoral dissertation, I am doing a descriptive study on the relationship between parents and their gay and lesbian adult children. I will be exploring parents' and

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their adult children's conceptual understanding of the parent-child relationship in its entirety from the adult children's adolescent years to the present. Both the positive and negative experiences of the adult children and their respective parents will be explored. In particular, if and how their relationship changed following the adult child's disclosure or the parent(s)' discovery of their child's homosexuality will be discussed.

This research will aid clinicians, mental health professionals, parents, gays and lesbians in understanding and strengthening the parent-child relationship. . .

. . . I would like to assure you that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and anonymous. As a result, you may discontinue the study at any time without penalty. If your participation in this study raises any concerns a referral for support and counselling will be offered.

If you are willing to consider participation in this study please contact me at the following number for more details: [REDACTED] (Louise Mackay per Dr. B. Paulson).

(Editor: This is a great **volunteer opportunity for us as PFLAG parents!**)

It's a Lesbian Life!

January/February 1998

NOT A BIOGRAPHY OF A NOT-FINISHED LIFE

by Judy Nosworthy

I have been a lesbian all of my life. I have been out to my employer, the Metropolitan Toronto Police Service, since 1992. While I do not think it is important for my employer to know my sexual orientation, I do believe that it is important for my employer - any employer - to know how one expects to be treated as an employee. I have learned that gender, colour and sexual orientation play a key role in that treatment.

I was born and raised in a suburb of Toronto and graduated from the University of Toronto in 1985 with an honours degree in English Literature and Political Science. By all accounts, I think I had a pretty uneventful childhood that was not scarred by any singular traumatic event. My parents were semi-professionals and I



have an older brother with whom I am presently estranged.

I became a police officer because I wanted a job that wouldn't require me to do the same thing every day. I also wanted a job that would allow me a degree of economic stability equal to that which my male counterparts had come to expect. I have remained a police officer for the past ten years because I enjoy the

challenge, both within the organization and on the street.

To say that my life has gone swimmingly well since I became a police officer would be misleading, but I am unclear as to how much of the conflict was a natural result of my own maturing as a person and, therefore, to be expected, versus hardship due to attitudes and opinions held by those around me.

Whatever the case may be, the argument becomes academic. The bottom line is that life can be very difficult if one chooses to be true to one's self, whether or not one is gay or straight or male or female or black or white. I think we all have a responsibility, primarily to ourselves, to stand up for what we believe in.

In my case, I believe that, regardless of gender or sexual orientation, I can be a valuable asset to my employer. What I lack in certain areas due to my own inadequacies, which I attribute to myself rather than

some generic label, I compensate for in other areas.

As an identified minority, it is my responsibility to educate my employer, just as other visible minorities and women have done in the past. In so doing, however, I believe that it is important not to become a sacrificial lamb. I also believe that I am not here to further any political agendas or careers, whether they originate from within the gay community (whatever that means) or not.

Professionally, I spent seven years in one division doing a variety of duties including emergency response, foot patrol and being an investigator within the youth bureau. From there, I was had-picked to assist in the development and implementation of a previously-mandated response to domestic violence in partnership with the 519 Community Centre, the Metropolitan Toronto Police Service and the Attorney General of Ontario's office. I was then transferred to what was then known as "Community Programs", but did not see this as an opportunity for growth, either professionally or personally. I then went to 51 Division, which has the largest social assistance population in Metro Toronto. I went back to emergency response and

then moved into the community response unit.

One of my first encounters within the community response unit included the discovery that the Wellesley Hospital, which is in 51 Division, had set up a protocol for responding to gay bashing in conjunction with the 519 Community Centre and the University of Toronto. The police were not involved. There were conflicted stories as to why, but we were not there. With the cooperation of my unit commander and the neighbouring division and our Hate Crimes Unit, this situation was quickly remedied.

As well as linking the various agencies, this incident proved to be a useful catalyst between 51 Division and the Wellesley Hospital for the development of other policies. I am still working in the community response unit.

To pigeon-hole one's self is to limit one's won growth, which ultimately becomes self-destructive. As a police officer, I deal with a vast array of people in crisis. I have noticed that the constant factor in all of these people is not economics or level of education or anything tangible, but, rather, a lack of personal growth, or the inability to see that there is something beyond the wall

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that we have backed ourselves up against. Sometimes we just don't see it.

As a woman in a male-dominated profession, I have had to work very hard to achieve the same success as my male counterparts. As a lesbian, I have been subjected to personal scrutiny that is both invasive and irrelevant. As I watch colleagues with less experience and ability get opportunities that I think should be mine, I see quite clearly that life is not fair. Al I get excluded from certain social functions because people are unsure of me, I am continually learning that people are not always kind. **As I watch other gay and lesbian officers, so deeply closeted from their employer yet so out in the community, make derogatory comments directed towards gay, lesbian and bisexual people in all professions, I am made aware that not everyone is respectful of others or themselves.**

But then there are what I call tender mercies. The Police Chief who says yes, you should go on national television if full uniform to add weight to the fight for inclusion of sexual orientation in the Canadian Human Rights Code. The Fringe Benefits Manager who

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commended me for taking responsibility four years ago when I successfully argued to have the son my spouse and I have in common and my spouse put on my benefit plan. The senior officer who tells me that I am the breath of fresh air that this organization needs. The guy sitting next to me in the scout car who says that, whatever else people may say, I've got balls (I think this is a compliment.). The person on the street who has read about me or has seen me on television who thanks me for just being here. And my family that lets me know that, no matter what is going on "out there", they love and respect me for who I am.

And I believe that it is the tender mercies that we all need to seek out and acknowledge every day.

U of A International Centre Newsletter

This newsletter received a request from a gay foreign student asking how she/he might best "come out" here in Edmonton. The following apt advice was given:

Studying abroad often enhances the continual process of self-discovery and personal growth. No longer under possible restrictions of their home country, it is not uncommon for study abroad

students to "come out" - whether it be to friends, relatives or even to themselves.

It is important to remember that every culture has different beliefs on homosexuality and that people will express their attitudes in a variety of ways. Given the cultural diversity in this country, Canadians vary in their beliefs - some may be very accepting towards gays, lesbians and bisexuals (herein known as GLB), while others may feel threatened or uncomfortable. To minimize unpleasant experiences, it is important for you to know whom you can trust to be respectful, accepting and supportive of you as an individual. I was pleased to hear from a GLB campus group that the University of Alberta campus is fairly accepting and supportive; however this may not always be true of the larger community. . . .

Rowena

New Students "on the Block"

SIDERITE, a new students' group formed in the fall of '97, serves as a support group for lesbian, bisexual and gay students living in University of Alberta residences. They hold information sessions, provide support amongst their

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members and have planned outings e.g. bowling, movies, coffee nights, etc.

For information phone: 492-4281 Greg (Wellness Centre) and he will put you in touch with *SIDERITE*.

Homophobia Probe

Edmonton - The impacts of homophobia on **Alberta gay teens** are being investigated by a University of Alberta doctoral student. Gloria Felax says she particularly wants to learn about **their experiences- now or recently - in Alberta high schools.**

Gloria may be reached, in confidence, by calling [REDACTED] (collect) or through e-mail at:

[REDACTED]
Her findings should interest many students, educators and activists.

"... and then the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom"

Anais Nin

ON THE BOOKSHELF**Dealing with Your Feelings:
A Guide to Coming Out for
Persons with Gender
Identity Issues**

(Denny, Dallas, 2nd ed, 1997)

A new booklet is now available at the Gay & Lesbian Community Centre (10612-124 St; Ph 488-3234) and also from PFLAG/T (465-3057). It is part of the AEGIS (American Educational Gender Information Service) Transition Series.

As stated in the introduction, "Many transgendered and transsexual persons (transpersons) are quite comfortable with themselves. They are proud of who they are and would not change things if they could. They have incorporated their individual expressions of gender into the fabric of their lives. Some become supremely confident, hiding nothing, happy and secure, expressing their gender as they see fit, with few or no negative repercussions.

Such confidence is not gained overnight. Most transpersons engage in a slow and often painful process of self-exploration which can last for years. They educate themselves, and they educate others about themselves. They "come out". That is,

they come to accept and become comfortable with their nature.

Unfortunately, many transpersons remain alone and afraid. Fearing rejection, they never share their feelings with anyone. They live their lives, and sometimes terminate them prematurely, without ever coping with the thing that troubles them most.

This booklet is for those persons who have not yet come to terms with themselves. Its purpose is to help them to deal with feelings of guilt or insecurity, to explore and perhaps seek help for their gender identity issues, to make the expression of their gender identity a part of their existence, and to hopefully live happier and more productive lives.

COMING EVENTS**Embracing Spirituality/
Embracing Sexuality**

A conference which seeks to explore lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender realities in a faith context. The presentations deal with the language of homosexuality, the need for a safe environment in the school and in the workplace, the 'coming out' process, and issues of faith and spirituality. Clergy, theologians, and laity will

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share some of their denominational positions as they affect gays and lesbians.

Both Svend Robinson and Bill Richardson will address conferees on Friday evening and Sunday morning respectively. See you there!

March 20 - 22/ 1998**Grant MacEwan College**

For further information please call Bert & Evelyn at [REDACTED]

**VALENTINE TEA
& SILENT AUCTION****Sunday, February 8/ 98**

7:30 pm

Rutherford House
11153 Saskatchewan Drive
Tickets: \$15.00

Limited attendance; please book early!

Contacts:

Phone: [REDACTED]

E-mail: [REDACTED]

Sponsored by EPOCH and Womens Studies Connecting Group, University of Alberta Fundraiser for Ms. T.